

fast FACTS...

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about Sedgwick County Government



Facts About Ricin

What is Ricin?

Ricin is a poison that can be made from the waste left over from processing castor beans and can be in the form of powder, mist, pellet, or it can be dissolved in water or weak acid. It is a stable substance that is not affected much by extreme conditions such as hot or cold temperatures.

Where is Ricin found and how can it be used?

Ricin comes from the waste or "mash" of processing castor beans to make castor oil. It does have some potential medical uses, such as bone marrow transplants and cancer treatment (to kill cancer cells). Unfortunately, ricin can also be used as a poison.

How can a person be exposed to Ricin and is it contagious?

Accidental exposure to ricin is highly unlikely. It would take a deliberate act to make ricin and use it to poison people. Poisoning could happen by breathing in ricin mist or powder or swallowing food or water which has been contaminated. Ricin poisoning is not contagious. It cannot spread from person to person through casual contact.

What are the symptoms of Ricin poisoning?

There are three types of ricin poisoning: inhalation, ingestion, and skin/eye exposure.

Inhalation: Initial symptoms of ricin poisoning may occur within eight hours of exposure. Symptoms may include difficulty breathing, fever, cough, nausea and tightness in the chest. Heavy sweating may follow as well as fluid build up in the lungs (pulmonary edema).

Ingestion: Following ingestion of ricin poisoning, initial symptoms may occur in less than six hours, but normally are apparent between one and three days. Symptoms of ricin poisoning by ingestion may include: vomiting, diarrhea that may become bloody, severe dehydration, and low blood pressure. Other symptoms may include hallucinations, seizures and blood in the urine.

What is Sedgwick County doing to protect the community from Ricin?

With the threat of terrorist attacks, citizens look to local government for answers on how we can be safe and respond to incidents in our community. Sedgwick County is leading a coordinated effort through our Health Department to assure the health and safety of our citizens in the event of a terrorist incident. Visit www.sedgwickcounty.org or call the MMRS hotline at (316) 660-5551, to learn more.

Skin/Eye Exposure: Ricin in the powder or mist form can cause redness and pain on the skin and in the eyes.

Death from ricin poisoning could take place within 36 to 72 hours of exposure, depending on the method of exposure (inhalation, ingestion or injection) and the dose received.

How is Ricin treated?

There is not an antibiotic to treat ricin. If you are exposed to ricin, get the ricin off or out of your body as soon as possible. Ricin poisoning is treated with supportive medical care to minimize its effects. If you have been exposed to ricin through skin/eye exposure, you should follow these steps:

Remove your clothing: Take off any clothing that may have been exposed to ricin. Clothing which must go over your head should be cut off. Avoid touching the areas of clothing which may have been exposed. Also, remove contacts if they have been exposed. Wearing rubber gloves or using tongs, place all exposed clothing, contacts and items that have been exposed in a plastic bag and seal. This bag should then be placed inside another plastic bag and sealed.

Wash yourself: Wash the areas of your skin that may have been exposed with ricin with large amounts of soap and water. If ricin has gotten into your eyes, flush them with plain water for 10 to 15 minutes.

Is there a Ricin vaccine available?

At this time, no specific vaccine or antitoxin exists.

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